The Link between Team Associations and Team Product Consumptive Behaviors

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Relevance/Significance of the Topic to Sport Management

The financial contribution of sports teams to sport industry is substantial. Likewise, the importance of effective brand management has been recognized in the context of team sports. Sport managers and organizations have been capitalizing sport teams as a brand for their business strategies (Gladden & Funk, 2002). While substantial research (Gladden & Funk, 2002; Ross, James, & Vargars, 2006; Ross, Bang, and Lee, 2007) highlights the importance of team associations (e.g., stadium community, team success, or fan socialization), to our knowledge, little research has attempted to examine the relationship between team associations and actual team product consumption. To justify our argument, we have reviewed all peer-reviewed publications (post 2002 since team association model/scale has been introduced by Gladden & Funk) in seven major sport journals. We believe there is no published research exploring the link between team associations and actual team product consumption (i.e., game attendance, TV sports watching, team merchandise purchasing, and Internet usage specific to team sports).

Review of Relevant Literature

Relatedly, researchers within the context of sport have attempted to explore perceived team associations including Gladden and Funk (2002) and Ross, James, and Vargars (2006). Using Aaker (1996, 1997) and Keller’s (1993) framework as a foundation in their research, both Team Association Model and Team Brand Association Scale (TBAS) have been proposed and tested. While acknowledging their contribution to the existing literature, we have realized several limitations in their research. Our major concerns were in twofold: (1) a need for improvement in psychometric properties (e.g., low AVE values and low internal consistencies in the TBAS), and (2) a need for further research that explore relationships between team associations and actual team product consumption among active sport consumers. Furthermore, some researchers (e.g., Bouzdine-Chameeva, Ferrand, Valette-Florence, & Chanavat, 2015) have indicated that the types of brand associations may vary among consumers due to individual differences. Under this premise, the current study purports to examine varying team association types across groups based on their level of team identification. Knowing what team associations customers hold can be beneficial for marketers to effectively manage team brands and create impactful team associations toward their marketing/management effort.

Purpose and Objectives

Since little is known about how perceived team associations trigger team product consumption in the field of sport, the current study purports to answer the following research questions: (1) how individuals with varying levels of team identification perceive team associations differently?, (2) what team associations explain the extent to which actual sport consumption behaviors?, and (3) how much variance on actual sport consumption behaviors is explained by the team associations.

Method

This exploratory study will take a survey approach aiming convenience data of approximately 300-400 individuals who actively consume professional and collegiate sports (three major pro sports including NBA, NFL, and MLB and two D-I collegiate sports including basketball and football). The instruments consist of 41 items from Ross, James, and Vargas’ (2006) Team Brand Association Scale, Trail and Robinson’s (2001) team identification scale, four consumption items including game attendance, televised sports watching, team merchandise purchasing, and usage of the Internet specific to team sports. These scales have been tested in the literature and deemed to have adequate psychometric properties. In this study, items will be anchored by a 7-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly...
Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree. The instrument is currently (revision phase) under IRB review. Data will be analyzed via confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), correlation analysis, multivariate analysis of covariate (MANCOVA), and regression analysis.

Using CFA, psychometric properties of the items will be tested through average variance extracted, Cronbach’s alpha, and factor correlations. For the remaining data analyses, two split sample based on the level of team identification will be used. For each group, correlation analysis will be used to see how overall team association types and four sport consumptive behaviors are related to each other. Using dummy coding, a new variable will be created classifying high and low team identification groups. A t-test will be used to see if these groups are statistically different. MANCOVA will be performed to test significant differences between group means. Lastly, a series of multiple regression analysis will be conducted to examine the extent to which team associations have significant impact on four sport behaviors. To minimize Type-1 error, bonferroni inequality adjustment will be considered (Hair et al., 2010).

Discussion

A thorough understanding of sport consumers’ perceived associations with teams is vital to launch effective branding tactics toward current and prospect sport consumers. Many scholars have pointed out the importance of team associations that would have a positive influence on consumer behaviors (e.g., Dhurup & Mafini, 2015; Ross, 2007). Relatedly, investigating the relationship between team associations and actual team product consumption will warrant marketing benefits.

The results of this study may show that there is a significant relationship between the team brand association and product consumption. The findings may provide fruitful insights for brand managers pertaining to what brand associations actually trigger sport consumptive behaviors, especially when the level of team identification is controlled. Subsequently, understanding consumer perceptions on team associations can help marketers effectively design and implement their marketing tactics for increased return on their investment.